



Houston

CONSTRUCTION™

NEWS *Reprint*

The Industry's Newspaper

www.constructionnews.net

(281) 657-0511 ★ Home Ofc : P.O. Box 791290 San Antonio, TX 78279 (210) 308-5800 ★ FEB 2007 ★ Vol. 5 ★ No. 2

F

O

C

U

S

This
Month

Construction Safety

How safe is your company?



Interview with

Brandon Boyd, director of safety services
Fretz Construction Company
Houston

Brandon Boyd has been employed with Fretz Construction since June 1999. He began as a laborer on a part-time basis while attending college. After graduating from Texas A&M University, he took a full time position with the company as a labor foreman.

"My mother's family is of Spanish descent," said Boyd. "Being bilingual has been beneficial to me in the construction industry."

Within four short months, Boyd began to assist the former safety director with job site inspections and worker safety orientations. Since last March, he has held the position of director of safety services.

Boyd said there are four primary hazards that account for the majority of injuries and deaths in the construction industry.

"The first one is fall hazards. It's more than just utilizing fall protection systems. It can also be something as simple as improper ladder use for example. Second is being struck by something—unsafe operation of a vehicle, not properly hoisting or loading materials, falling objects, to name a few. Caught-in hazards generally

refer to trenching and excavation work. Cave-ins are likely the most feared trenching hazard. Finally, electrical issues like contact with energized lines, improper usage of cords, or lack of grounding can cause injury."

To keep these accidents at bay, Boyd believes an aggressive safety program is a company's first line of defense against safety hazards.

"It needs to be willing to change as new standards are developed," he said. "It's got to encompass all the potential hazards and problems you're going to see on site, and regular inspections should be conducted to expose and abate hazards that are present on a given job site."

He also feels one of the most important components to an effective safety program is having the support of upper management and company principals.

"Your program must have a solid backbone. If you've got a program, but upper management doesn't endorse it, there will be problems enforcing it and injuries will eventually happen."

Along with supportive management, a good safety program involves more than just following the rules set by OSHA, according to Boyd. It should instill a mentality in workers.

"One thing many area contractors do each year is an AGC initiated meeting called Stand Down for Safety where job sites take time out of their day to go over safety. This goes above and beyond the normal safety talks on the job site. The last Stand Down's topic was 'Why Do I Work Safe?' The theme focused workers on their family as the reason they work safe. They want to provide for their family, see their kids go to college, etc. This topic has remained a recurring theme at the morning safety talks foremen have with their workers."

Boyd said one improvement that could advance construction safety is incorporating pre-engineering safety into the planning stage.

"If architects and engineers started including items such as permanent anchor points for fall protection in their plans and drawings, it would be helpful for workers during the construction, as

well as for post construction maintenance. This idea has been talked about for quite some time. You've got all this metal and steel; why in the world would you not have certain points where you could safely tie off?"

Boyd cites liability issues as reasons architects and engineers are reluctant to take the initiative.

He said changing the industry has been a slow process. However, it has come along quite a bit in recent years. Safety standards common today were unheard of only a few years ago.

"When I started working in construction in 1999, there wasn't a regular safety presence on the job site. There weren't frequent audits or safety inspections. We used to not have to do many of the things we do now."

"Fretz has been around since 1923, and for us it's funny looking back at old pictures to see how far we've come. You didn't see hard hats or safety glasses. It just wasn't a part of their environment. But Fretz was more safety conscious than most. Back in the early '50s, Edmond Fretz even received a safety excellence award for accident prevention from AGC. To this day, Fretz has never had a fatality, and we will continue to uphold a high standard of safety."—sn